

Staking Out Battle Lines, House Votes to Keep U.S. in Paris Climate Pact

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Highlight: The House passed a bill on Thursday that would block President Trump from quitting the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Body

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WASHINGTON — The House passed a bill on Thursday that would block President Trump from abandoning the Paris Agreement on climate change and require his administration to devise a plan to cut America's greenhouse gas emissions.

The measure, which passed 231-190, was the first big global warming legislation to win congressional approval in almost 10 years. It stands virtually no chance of approval in the Republican-controlled Senate. But with the vote, Democrats sought to tie Republicans to Mr. Trump, who has said that climate change is a hoax, and isolate them on an issue they believe is resonating strongly with voters.

Three Republicans voted in favor. No Democrats opposed it.

"It is time to end denial about this and start listening to the facts. This is about science, science, science," the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, said before the vote. "We have an imperative to have climate action now."

Senator Mitch McConnell, the majority leader, issued a statement calling the House bill a "futile gesture to handcuff the U.S. economy." He said it would "go nowhere" in the Senate.

Mr. Trump has said he will withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, under which nearly 200 countries agreed to voluntarily reduce greenhouse gases in order to avert the worst effects of global warming. It required both rich and poor countries to pledge reductions, a shift from previous agreements that required action only from the industrialized countries largely responsible for the greenhouse gases emitted so far.

The collective result of the Paris pact, scientists said when it was adopted, fell far short of the action needed to prevent a dangerous increase in global temperatures, but was nonetheless an important starting point and market signal.

According to the rules of the pact, which was adopted in 2016 under President Barack Obama, Mr. Trump cannot formally withdraw until November 2020.

Under the deal, the Obama administration promised to cut United States carbon pollution at least 28 percent below 2005 levels by 2025. China, which is now the world's biggest climate polluter, vowed to slow the growth of its emissions and peak by 2030. India said it would improve its carbon intensity, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted per unit of gross domestic product, while still allowing total emissions to rise through 2030.

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Mr. Trump, in vowing to leave the pact, said the Paris Agreement “hamstrings the United States while empowering some of the world’s top-polluting countries.”

In a heated, daylong debate leading up to Thursday’s vote, Republicans largely avoided questioning climate science. Several, in fact, said they believed human-caused warming was an issue worth confronting. They generally echoed Mr. Trump’s economic argument and pointed to China as a country they said was not doing enough.

Representative Jodey Arrington, Republican of Texas, called the participation of the United States “a gift to our enemies.” Representative Steve Scalise of Louisiana, the second-ranking Republican in the House, called the accord a “disaster of an agreement” that would send American jobs to China and India, which he incorrectly described as being “exempt” from the deal.

The House legislation would forbid the Trump administration from using federal funds to withdraw from the accord.

The last time the House passed major climate change legislation was in 2009, when Democrats last held the majority and narrowly approved a bill that would have capped the country’s emissions while allowing utilities and other businesses to trade pollution permits. The measure died in the Senate.

A procedural motion in the Republican-controlled Senate to take up another significant climate measure, the Green New Deal, which calls on the federal government to rapidly eliminate planet-warming fossil fuel emissions, failed to get a single vote.

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PHOTO: Nancy Pelosi, the House speaker, led a gathering last month to introduce the measure passed by representatives on Thursday. (PHOTOGRAPH BY J. Scott Applewhite/Associated Press FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

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